United Nations A/HRC/31/NGO/59

General Assembly

Distr.: General
19 February 2016

English and Spanish only

**Human Rights Council**
**Thirty-first session**
Agenda item 3
**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development**

# Written statement* submitted by the Association Miraisme International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[13 February 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.16-02535(E)

Please recycle

# Education about religion as a means to strengthen tolerance and respect

As contained in the report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief of last December 2015[1], on many occasions when meditating upon the reconciliation between freedom of religion and freedom of expression no lines are identified harmonizing these two fundamental rights.

The skepticism mentioned by the Special Rapporteur Heiner Bielefeldt is caused by a lack of understanding among different social spheres who believe that freedom of expression must come before freedom of religion or vice versa. This historic debate today is at the point of greatest conflict, due to globalization and increased migration. It is necessary, therefore, to discuss possible solutions that harmonize the two rights in the short, medium and long term.

As detailed in the same report[2] : 'the positive relationship between freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression is not just a theoretical postulate" because 'holders of rights are human beings who can exercise these freedoms individually or in community' Thus, it is considered that both believers of different religious communities and non-believers can freely express their thoughts and ideologies.

Analyzed in this way, the gap that apparently separates the two rights is shortened, leaving only pending to determine the limit on their exercise: understanding that the use of these two types of freedom to attack human dignity is a borderline that must be considered not only when manifesting dogmas but also when expressing negative opinions about the different religious communities and beliefs. That is, the value of human dignity is the factor that defines the limit of the expression of faith and also of any opinion on religious communities.

The absolute value of the human being as the bearer of inalienable rights is a term that should be developed and internalized by members of all societies and especially those in which the plurality is wider. Thus, the internalization of the value of human beings and human dignity could allow communities to move towards coexistence with respect.

Often intolerance and negative stereotypes comes from cultural ignorance and lack of knowledge of the other. The absence of accurate information about others and distorted references that media and social networks might offer, are elements that lead to the promotion of discriminatory and hostile attitudes against those considered different.

For this reason we consider that education plays a vital role in building tolerant and inclusive societies. Education, as a means to internalize the human dignity of others, starting from the knowledge of their history, culture and religion becomes a mechanism for the defense and promotion of human rights. This was considered by UNESCO when stating that: "there are a number of groups around the world who have spoken of the need to teach the different religions in each nation to better understand and overcome the intolerance that ignorance might bring "[2].
In the same way, such an idea was reflected in the report by the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues presented last January 5 (2015)[3]. In such a report Rita Izsak highlights the role of education in 'promoting intercultural understanding, mutual respect and tolerance between groups' of different communities. Therefore, it is considered that: 'Education in human rights should be an important part of school curricula, which should also include the history, culture and traditions of minority groups as well as its important contribution to the enrichment of our societies'.

---

[1]Report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Freedom of Expression . Retrieved February 6, 2016 from: http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/5109708.90522003.html

[2] Tolerance as the threshold of peace. United Nations, organization for Education, Science and Culture. France.

[3]Report of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues. Retrieved February 6, 2016 from: http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/550829174.pdf

The introduction of this type of content in the curricula of schools could bring different types of benefits for the community and for the students, including:

a) Reduction of social conflicts that occur due to cultural, ideological and religious differences,
b) Fewer hate speeches and therefore fewer cases of harassment of minorities and especially towards religious minorities,
c) Better understanding between communities with different beliefs,
d) Humanization of each individual, who will then be treated as equals and with equal rights, regardless of their exercise of freedom of religion or belief,
e) Respect for human rights in different areas: social, work, school, family, etc.

It has been observed that in some communities, particularly in those where there is a majority religious community, stigmatization and religious persecution is generated from nuclear families: it is the members of the families of persons belonging to a minority religious who first reject any dogma or religious belief different from those profess by most of the family.

For some, it is a great challenge to live with multi-denominational issues within their families, this being a shock and almost a break in family bonds. Therefore, it is necessary to teach that all humans need to recognize the great influence, both at a personal and social level that religion has in the life of a person without that involving contempt by others, as education is linked to respect for freedom and human dignity.

As noted, the importance of understanding religious diversity is increasing these days, given that only through knowing the other one could come to understand his reality and way of thinking. Thus, the development of tolerance, empathy, and respect, among others, must go hand in hand with curricula that promote these values.

According to the above, we propose here to include the study of different religions in educational programs, in the same way that different philosophical, political and artistic movements are studied; revealing their history, geographical position, customs and general principles, encouraging the active participation of the different religions in the elaboration of curricula.

Knowledge about different religions brings together students from diverse and distant cultural dimensions, thus expanding their ability to understand the global reality in which they live and the different individuals that belong to such reality. That will ultimately contribute to personal growth and the construction of harmonic societies.

Full compliance with the rights of the individual is achieved as long as their individual rights are protected effectively and in a way that all citizens enjoy their rights thus promoting tolerance and coexistence with respect.